



Varese, 13/05/2020

To the attention of the President and Vice-Presidents of the European
Parliament

Mr David SASSOLI
Ms Mairead McGUINNESS
Mr Pedro SILVA PEREIRA
Mr Rainer WIELAND
Ms Katarina BARLEY
Mr Othmar KARAS
Ms Ewa Bożena KOPACZ
Ms Klara DOBREV
Ms Dita CHARANZOVA
Ms Nicola BEER
Ms Livia JÁRÓKA
Ms Heidi HAUTALA
Mr Marcel KOLAJA
Mr Dimitrios PAPADIMOULIS
Mr Fabio Massimo CASTALDO

Cc:

Mr Johannes HAHN - Commissioner responsible for Budget and Administration
Ms Mariya GABRIEL - Commissioner responsible for Innovation, Research, Culture,
Education and Youth
Ms Helena DALLI - Commissioner responsible for Equality
Ms Gertrud INGESTAD - Director General of DG HR
Mr. Stephen QUEST - Director General of DG JRC
Mr Giancarlo MARCHEGGIANO - Secretary General of the European Schools
Ms Ariane FARINELLE - Director of the European School of Varese
Mr. Krzysztof MARUSWEWKI - DG JRC Representative in the Administrative Board of
the European School of Varese
Mr. Marinus STROOSNIJDER - DG JRC Ispra Site Manager
Mr. Athanasios KATSOGIANNIS - President of JRC Ispra/Seville Local Staff Committee
Mr. Pere MOLES-PALLEJA - President of Interparents

Vertical grouping for the teaching of mother tongue to Students Without a Language Section (SWALS) attending Primary Level at the European School of Varese, Italy

Dear Honourable President and Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament,

We are writing in our capacity as Parents Association of the European School of Varese (AGSEV) to express our grave concern at the implementation of vertical groupings for the teaching of **mother tongue (Language 1, L1) to Students Without a Language Section (SWALS)** attending primary level at the European School of Varese (ESV) in Italy, which is set to take effect as of the next school year 2020-2021.

The Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools (OSG) has asked ESV to introduce vertical grouping for L1 SWALS classes based on the ambiguous and open to interpretation paragraph 1.5b of the document *'Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools'* (Ref.: 2019-04-D-13-en-1, see attached).

The ESV has five language sections, namely English, French, German, Italian and Dutch, but students from many more EU nationalities, who have the right to tuition of their mother tongue, also attend this school. These students, who account for about 20% of the student population at ESV, are enrolled in the English, German, French or Italian sections as SWALS. The language of the section becomes the students' Language 2 (L2) (except for SWALS enrolled in the Italian section) and they are offered tuition also in their L1 in a reduced number of periods (more details below). The intention of the Director of ESV, on demand from OSG, to apply vertical grouping to L1 tuition in Primary school will seriously impact/jeopardise the tuition of the following EU languages: Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Danish, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian, Spanish and Swedish.

Albeit AGSEV's systematic efforts to prevent the roll-out of this policy already as of this school year (2019-2020), by presenting **pedagogical, political as well as financial** arguments, the OSG is insisting on ESV having to **group vertically its Primary 1 (P1) with P2 (P1+P2) and P3 with P4 and P5 classes (P3+P4+P5)** during their SWALS L1 lessons.

Such a drastic change would **discriminate against children without a language section** and would seriously **compromise the children's fundamental right to equal education of their L1 language**. It should be noted that a fundamental educational principle of the European Schools is the primacy of the pupils' mother tongue/dominant language (L1) in which high standards are expected to be developed. For most languages (e.g., Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, Lithuanian and Czech), the syllabus in the European Schools is the same as the one taught in the home country. Application of vertical groupings will seriously jeopardise teaching of L1 at the same level as offered in the respective home countries. Furthermore, it should be noted that, according to the same Decisions of the Board of Governors mentioned above, SWALS are already given a reduced L1 tuition as compared to other students in European Schools having as mother tongue the language of the section they attend. SWALS are given a **REDUCED number of L1 lessons**, corresponding to 2 hours 30 min per week in P1-P2 (5 periods of 30 min) instead of the standard 8 hours per week (16 periods of 30 min), or 3 hours 45 min per week in P3-P5 (5 periods of 45 min) instead of the standard 6 hours 45 min (9 periods of

45 min). What is even more worrying is that OSG does not take into account the concerns of the teachers and parents and, to our knowledge, neither OSG nor ESV have conducted any assessment for the effectiveness and impact of the proposed measures. For example, no assessment has been made/presented on the exact financial savings that will be achieved with this measure at ESV nor of the impact such a measure will have on the **European Baccalaureate results** for SWALS considering that **L1 has a weight of 30% in the final exams**. According to our calculations, if the proposed changes take place, the savings at ESV will be negligible. We strongly believe that there are several ways where such minimal cost reduction can take place without being at the detriment of core functions of the school.

Vertical grouping for the teaching of L1 to SWALS was already implemented in years 1 and 2 of secondary (S1+S2) at ESV two years ago. At that time, we were promised by the Director of the school that vertical groupings for the teaching of L1 to SWALS would never occur in primary because such a decision would be non-pedagogical given the very short length of the lessons (30-45 min), the young age of the students, and the rather different curricula of the five years in primary (e.g. P1 students do not know how to read and write while P2 students do). Two years after, the promise is forgotten, the pedagogical issues are no longer important and money seems to be the only thing that matters! Indeed, as clearly stated by the Secretariat-General of the European Schools, the argument for the application of the above-mentioned vertical groupings is based on budgetary savings and cost reductions only. Unfortunately, this request of the OSG has been strongly supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General Human Resources and Security (DG HR) who represent the European Commission in all European Schools' Administrative Boards.

Teachers at ESV are very much against this measure but, like parents, their concerns are being ignored. Teachers are fully convinced of the lack of pedagogical justification for such a decision. But we would like to bring to your attention another important problem that seems to be ignored by the OSG and the Direction of ESV. Our school has only one last teacher of SWALS L1 in primary who is seconded by an EU member country, namely the Spanish teacher. The other 13 L1 teachers are locally recruited. The implementation of vertical groupings will decrease the Spanish teaching hours to 49% of a full timetable, which could lead to closure and loss of this last secondment. Moreover, our school already has difficulties in locally recruiting language teachers. If the timetables for locally recruited teachers are also further reduced, the already bad contract conditions that are offered would be even less attractive. Many teachers will likely abandon ESV and look for better working conditions in other international schools in the region. ESV may publish new vacancies, but it is highly unlikely that any teacher will be interested in such a reduced contract and the school will no longer be able to offer L1 tuition to SWALS. We question if, in fact, this is not the true hidden objective behind this decision. The loss of a proportion (if not all) of the SWALS L1 teachers would certainly lead to financial gains. But at what cost, we ask? **Although on paper, the European Schools have as one of their most important principles to develop high standards in the mother tongue of their students, in practice at ESV, this will like cease to occur if the measure requested by OSG is put in practice.**

What is more, to our disappointment our School Direction informed the parents with an email on the 8th of May 2020, in the midst of the Coronavirus crisis, that our School is forced, by OSG, to proceed with vertical groupings for SWALS in Primary for the school year 2020-2021. As a consequence, SWALS who are already disadvantaged as explained above, will undergo a **further degradation of their L1 teaching quality**. And this will come on top of the difficulties all students are facing as a **consequence of the coronavirus crisis**. In the current climate, and in particular in our region which has been the epicentre of an unprecedented global crisis, we are all working hard in

order to find ways to support students and to try to bring the level of their education as close to normal as possible. Any action by OSG and ESV that is not contributing to this effort and further undermines the quality of SWALS L1 teaching is to our view simply unacceptable.

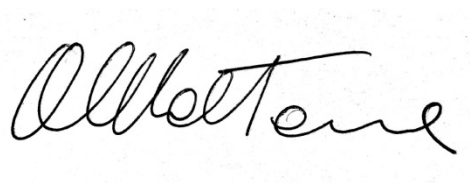
Honourable President and Vice-Presidents, we have pleaded several times with the school Direction as well as the OSG to reconsider their position. On the basis of the above, we kindly request your consideration and intervention to take any action considered appropriate for the protection of SWALS pupils' fundamental right for L1 education at the same level as in their home countries according to the **funding principles of European Schools**.

We ask you to directly inquire the OSG and the Director General of Human Resources of the European Commission to clarify what financial gain will be obtained with such an implementation in our school, to provide clear answers on the impact of such a decision and to answer to the various questions we raise in this letter to you.

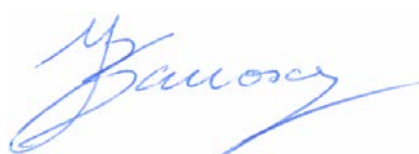
We remain at your disposal for any clarifications that may be required and we thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Yours Sincerely,

The President
Oswaldo MATTANA



The Vice-President / SWALS Representative
João BARROSO



SWALS Representative
Danai TSAPIKIDOU

